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ABSTRACT

Described here are ten Indian games with their rules, objects, number of players, scoring systems, and equipment requirements. A sketch of each game and its equipment is included, as is a short bibliography of books on Indians and their games. Other papers in the series from the Task Force on Ethnic Studies are SO 005 534 to SO 005 551. (OPH)

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INDIAN GAMES

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Minneapolis Public Schools
Task Force on Ethnic Studies
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GAMES

The Indians played a great variety of games. Some of them were quite simple, in which two or three players would take part, while others with hundred of players in them resembled sham battles. Many games were of a sacred character and were played for other reasons than pure amusement. They were used to heal the sick, to bring rain, to increase the fertility of animals and plants, to avert disaster, or as part of the ceremonials to amuse and entertain distinguished guests. Others trained men in the use of weapons and the strategy of war. Certain games were played at set times and seasons as necessary religious ceremonies. In connection with practically all of them there was considerable gambling.

The Indian had many games and amusements such as battledore, shuttlecock, quoits, cat's cradle, and a street game called cat or tipcat. They also had a great variety of dice and guessing games which were very popular. Children amused themselves with tops, stilts, and popguns made of ash and elder, from which they used to shoot wads of chewed elm bark. In the winter they coasted sleds of buffalo ribs or rawhide.

Like the games themselves, the implements with which they were played were considered sacred and could not be sold. They were often decorated with sacred symbols that were suppose to bring luck to the player. All players made their own gaming equipment. This was not difficult, for every adult Indian was more or less of a craftsman.

Saloman, Julian H. THE BOOK OF INDIAN CRAFTS AND INDIAN LORE. Harper & Row, 1928.

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SQUAW DICE

Just like many other peoples, Indians had gambling games. Some of the tales of gaming tell about gambling away wives and even one's last possessions. This is not so hard to visualize if you've ever played Women's Dice. It is still popular today and the players still get just as excited playing it as ever, even though the stakes aren't as high as in years gone by.

In the old days there were two sides. Most of the really big gambling went on at special gatherings where, together with the excitement, there was the added incentive of a crowd watching. The Indian placed little stock in earthly possessions, this resulted in players often betting heavily, and many times losing every thing they owned.

In the old way of playing the game, special sticks were used for scoring and the side that got all the sticks won, and the possessions were divided between the winners. When coin money came into use the game changed. Instead of two sides, any number of individuals could play, representing only themselves.

Each player used individual counters, usually seeds of some type, Buckeye seemed to be the most popular, however, many other seeds such as fig and persimon seeds, or plum pits were used. Each player received the same number of counters; and one who won all of the counters won the pot of coins, usually pennies or sometimes the game was played just for fun.

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POTAWATOMI SQUAW DICE

GUS-IGO-NUK

The dice used in this game are seven round dice and two animal dice, each with a black side and a natural side. Figures of birds, animals or heads may also be used. The dice are placed in a bowl and are hit on a cushion of blankets or some type of padding with one brisk motion so that the dice will be tossed up. The hand is released from the bowl immediately after the toss. Occasionally the dice are tossed and caught in mid-air into the bowl, after which the bowl is placed on the blanket. This choice is up to the player. After the toss, the dice are counted in the following manner:

All dice white	10 points
All dice black	10 points
Turtle black, others white	10 points
Turtle white, others black	10 points
Bear black, others white	10 points
Bear white, others black	10 points
1 white, others black	5 points
1 black, others white	5 points
2 white, others black	2 points
2 black, others white	2 points
Any other combination	0 points

Special Scoring

Bear standing	20 points
Turtle and Bear black, others white	20 points
Turtle and Bear white, others black	20 points

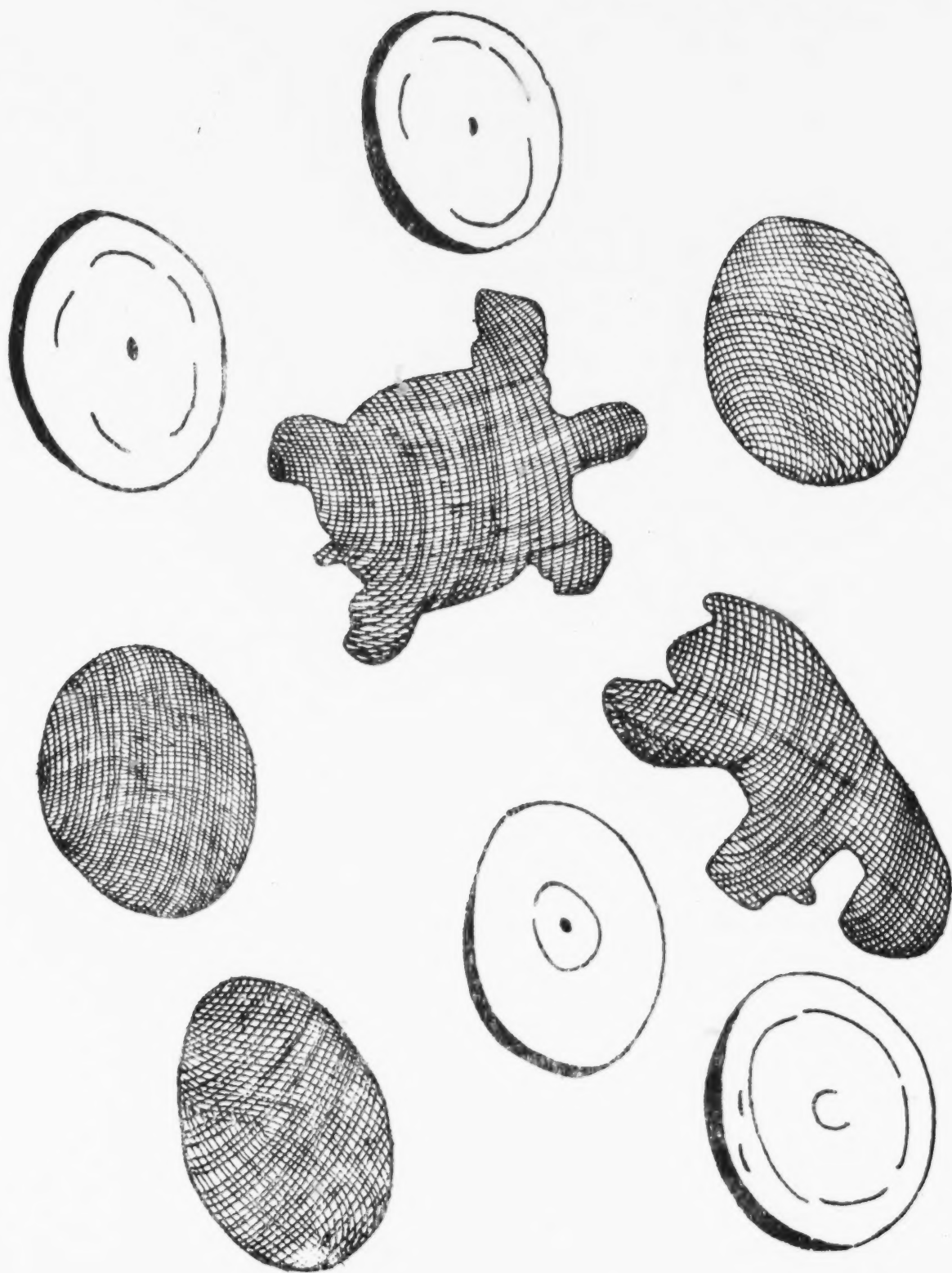
If the bear stands in any position except his side, this is called a Big Game, for it is an automatic win. The bear is constructed so that it is possible for it to stand on its feet, although difficult because of the small surface.

POTAWATOMI SQUAW DICE (Cont'd.)

Each player gets twelve counters worth one point each. These are moved from his starting pile to a second pile as he wins. When a player has moved all of his counters, he wins the game. If money was involved, each player would give the winner the amount agreed upon before the game. If anyone failed to make any points, he would pay double. If it was a Big Game, everyone would pay double, and a person failing to make any points would pay four times the agreed upon amount.

After each game, the dice proceed from player to player in the opposite direction from that in which they had previously traveled, starting at the winner's right or left. As each player tosses the dice, he often calls out words of good luck or encouragement, such as telling the bear to stand up, or rooting for the turtle to come up by itself, etc. The Indian words are used for these animals.

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WINNEBAGO SQUAW DICE

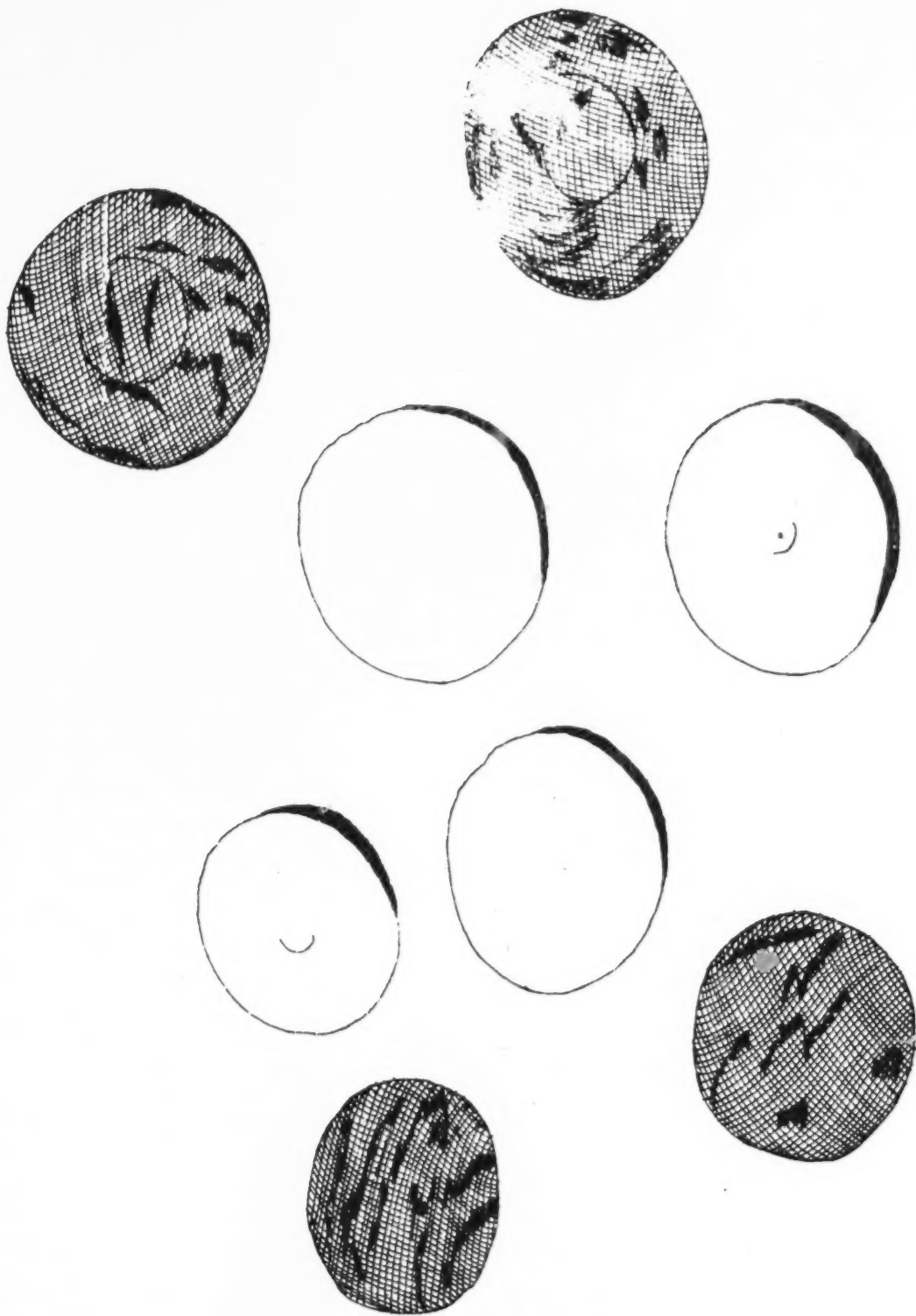
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The dice set used in this game are six plain dice and two round dice with lead inlay showing on both sides. These dice all have a blue side and a natural side.

Winnebago Dice is played the same as the Potawatomi Dice game except for the scoring and the counters used. Only ten counters are used, with buckeye the preferred. The scoring is as follows:

2 marked dice white, 6 blue	Big Game
2 marked dice blue, 6 white	Automatic Win
(Both the above count ten points)	
All 8 dice white	4 points
All 8 dice blue	4 points
1 marked dice white, 1 other white, other six blue.	2 points
1 marked dice blue, 6 white, 1 other blue	2 points
1 white, 7 blue	2 points
1 blue, 7 white	2 points
2 white, 6 blue	1 point
2 blue, 6 white	1 point
Any other combination	0 points

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BULL ROARER OR MOANING STICK

This is an Indian noisemaker, and it was big medicine with several different Indian tribes. The Apache, Navaho, Ute, and Pueblo Indians lived on hot, dusty plains where there was little rain. When the sun threatened to destroy the crops, the tribe's medicine man would use the bull roarer to imitate the sound of onrushing wind. He hoped that the sound might call forth winds that would drive rain clouds over the parched fields and water them.

To add to their power, lightning symbols and thunderbird designs were painted on the flat sided of the moaning sticks. The Apache liked to make their sticks out of pine wood, particularly from a tree that had been struck by lightning. This wood, they believed, had even greater medicine power in producing a thunderstorm, since lightning had made its home in the trees.

The name moaning stick comes from the Sioux Indians. Sioux medicine men spun their sticks rapidly, making a loud moaning sound; during funerals it was meant to drive off evil spirits.

Hofsinde, Robert (Gray Wolf). INDIAN GAMES AND CRAFTS. William Morrow & Co. New York, N.Y., 1957.

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DOUBLE BALL AND STICK

The Indian village was deserted this afternoon. Just outside the village, the teams of the Wolf and Beaver clans were facing each other in the center of a large playing field. The spectators stood in deep silence on the side lines. The score was tied, and a single goal would decide the winner of this hard, swift game of double ball.

The umpire, a warrior named Swift Eagle from the Turtle clan, waited until the teams were ready. Then suddenly he threw the double ball into the air between the teams, and at once there was a mad scramble of men and sticks. A Beaver man caught the thong between the balls with his crooked stick. Dodging right and left, he managed to get past the men of the Wolf team. When he had gained a lead, he stopped short. With a sure aim he sent the double ball flying through the air toward the Wolf goal. In a flash it had reached the goal, and the thong caught neatly on the crossbars of the goal posts.

Swift Eagle moved the scoring sticks together. The game was over, and the Beaver clan team had won. That night the Wolf clan would give a feast for their friends from the Beaver clan.

This game was played in spring, summer and fall. The game was played by both men and women. Played by either group, double ball was a hard and fast game.

Hofsinde, Robert (Gray Wolf). INDIAN GAMES AND CRAFTS. Marrow, 1957.



CHUNKKEY

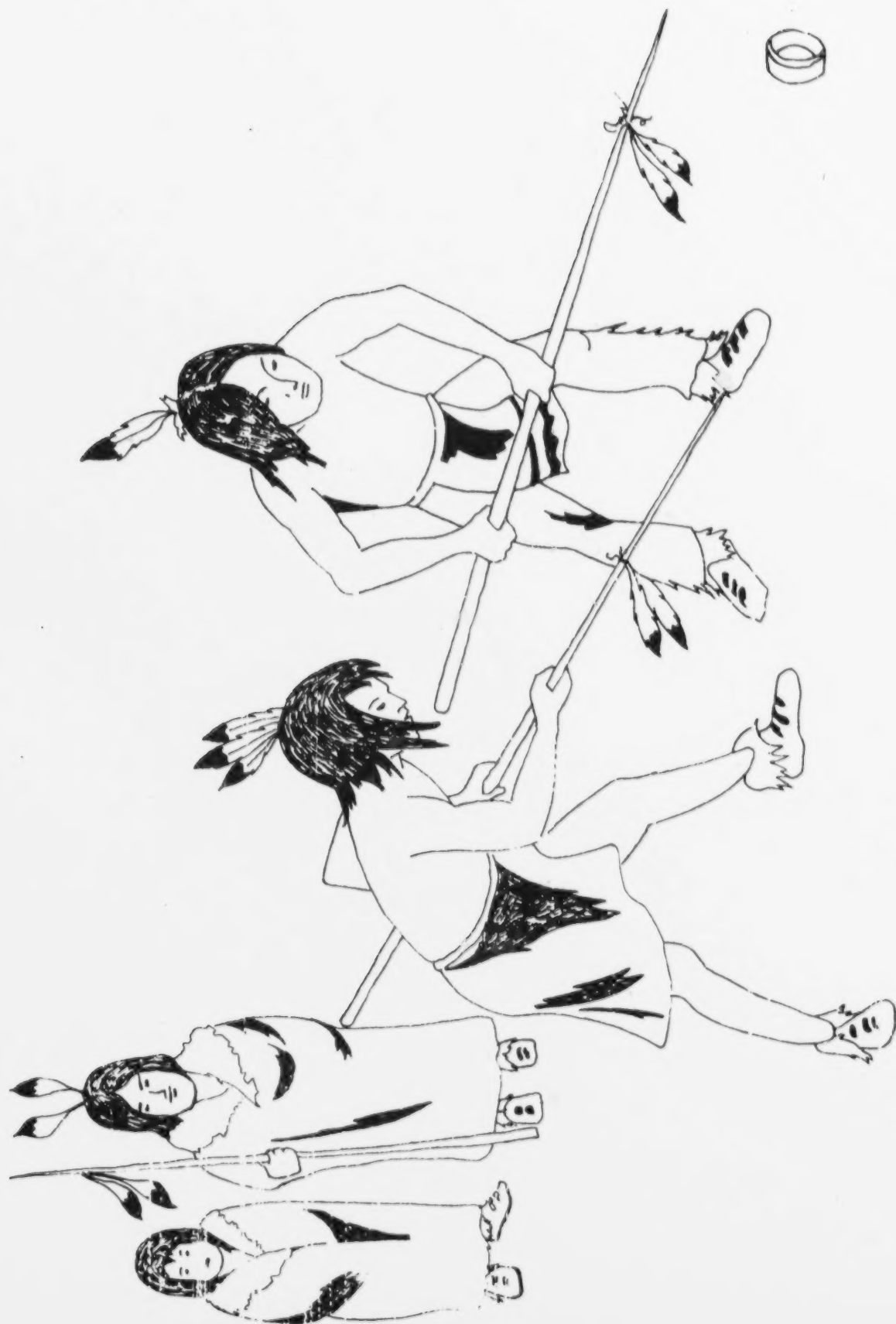
During the long winter months the Indians spent much time playing various games. One game of skill was called "Chunkkey". The game called for a quick eye and good timing. A player rolled a doughnut shaped stone disk across the snow. Two players with light wooden spears threw their spears at just the right moment so the spear would penetrate the center hollow of the rolling disk.

A leather prong up along the side of each spear had to encircle the disk when it came to a stop if the thrower was to gain a score for himself or his teammates.

The Indians admired physical skill and their many games helped to develop the bodies and coordination of the young boys, who started these games of skill at a very early age.

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CORNCOB DARTS

August, the Green Corn Moon had come once again, and the boys of the Ojibway village had obtained their mother's permission to gather two ears apiece of the new green corn.

The boys swarmed over the cornfield like so many blackbirds over a berry bush, and now they were all gathered on the shady side of Two Arrow's wigwam. Quick brown hands darted from corn to bone awl to feathers, as each boy worked on making his darts.

The husks were peeled away, and the kernels shelled off. Then, with a sharp bone awl, four holes were drilled into the blunt end of each corncob. Four wild turkey feathers were inserted in these holes so that the tips of the feathers curved away from the center.

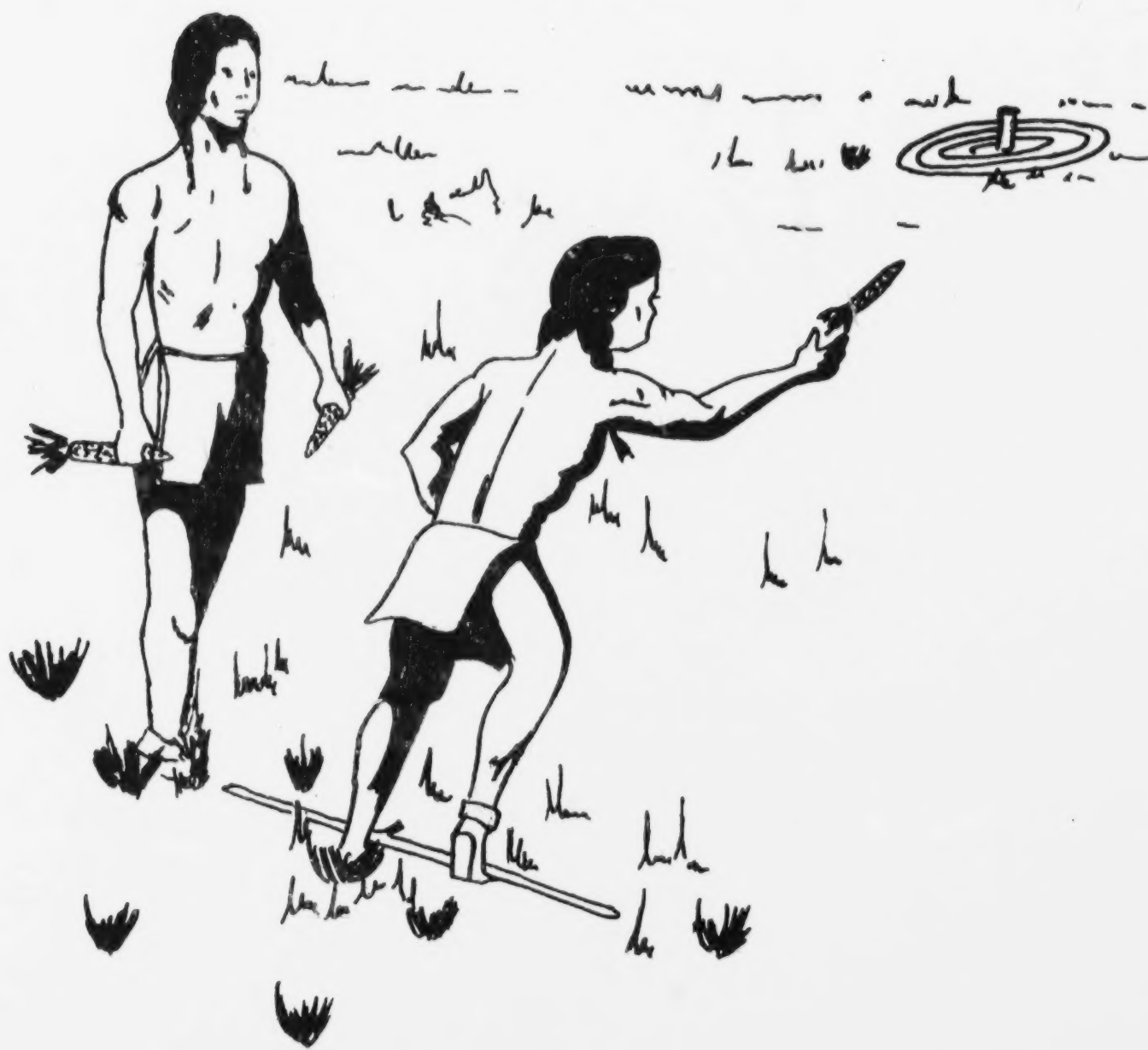
While all this activity was going on, one of the boys made a target. On a thick, flat piece of birch bark he scratched circles with a sharp stone. Then he peeled the bark away so that the dark inner bark showed in the center spot and in the third ring.

As soon as everything was in readiness, the group went to a fairly level clearing near the lake. Here the target was placed flat upon the ground; and a stick, cut to a point at one end, was driven through the center of the target and into the ground, held firmly in place by the stick driven through it.

Drawing a line on the ground some twenty feet from the target, each boy in turn stepped up to this line, toed the mark, hurled his corncob dart at the target. A scorekeeper kept the score on each throw.

Hofsinde, Robert. INDIAN GAMES AND CRAFTS. Morrow, 1957.

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LACROSSE

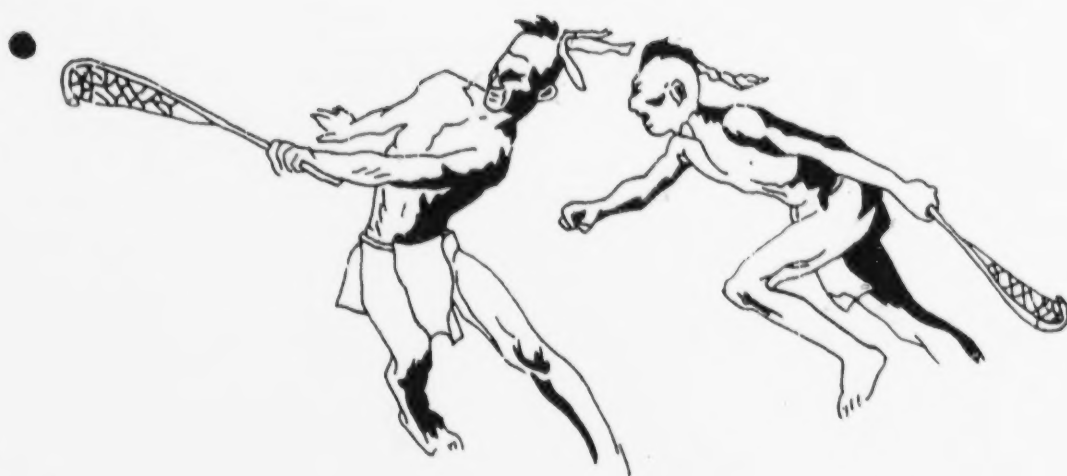
The best known of Indian games, and one that was played in one form or other by most of the tribes, is lacrosse. It gets its name from "crosse", or racket-like stick carried by each player. It is the fastest as well as the oldest games we know. To the Indian the game offered excellent training for war. It developed team work, gave practice in fast running, and in warding off blows of an adversary. Play was rough and any tactics were allowed.

Preparation for a big game was often carried on for months before it took place. Games, dances and ceremonies were held to bring strength and success to the game. To the Indian, lacrosse was more than just a sport. A person who was ill might be cured by watching a lacrosse game. A good game might please the spirits, and drive away famine and disease.

The game was played on a field from five hundred feet to a mile and a half long. At each end a goal, two posts set several feet apart, were erected. The object of the game was for one team to drive a wooden or buckskin ball between their opponents goal posts. The teams were not limited in number. Each player needed two identical sticks. The deerskin ball was thrown with the practiced aim of a hunter to the goals. The players were forbidden to touch the ball; they caught it, carried it, and threw it with their sticks. The score was twenty, which was kept by placing sticks near the goals.

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SNOWSNAKE

During the night a fine snow had fallen, hiding yesterday's tracks, and in the early morning sun this white blanket shimmered like millions of diamonds. The air was crisp, and as soon as the boys had finished their morning meal, they took up their snowsnakes and hurried down to the frozen lake. The "snake" was a long piece of wood, usually maple, about an inch and one half thick. The head of this stick was turned up slightly and carved to look like a snakes head. The length of the stick was polished to a smooth surface.

They planted the snowsnakes upright in the snow and spread out in two long lines. Then, using wide strips of bark for shovels, they built up a long, narrow bank of snow in a straight line. It was about two feet high, and three feet wide, and 1,000 to 2,000 feet long.

While the rest of the boys flattened the top of this snowbank, two of them hurried into the nearby forest. Soon they returned with a fairly stout limb from a tree. Two branches were protruding from the thinner end. Taking hold of these branches, and walking one on each side of the snowbank, they dragged the limb along the top center of the bank, from one end to the other. The weight of the limb made a shallow trench in the snow, and by the time they reached the end, all the boys were ready with their snowsnakes.

Some of them rubbed snow on the belly side of the snakes; others had already poured water on theirs; this had frozen as soon as they stepped outdoors and would give added speed to the snowsnakes as they were thrown.

Standing at one end of the prepared snowbank, each player in turn sent his snake skimming along the groove on top. Each player marked the place where his snake stopped, either with one of his arrows or with an owner stick.

The snowsnake was thrown underhand and required a great deal of skill to

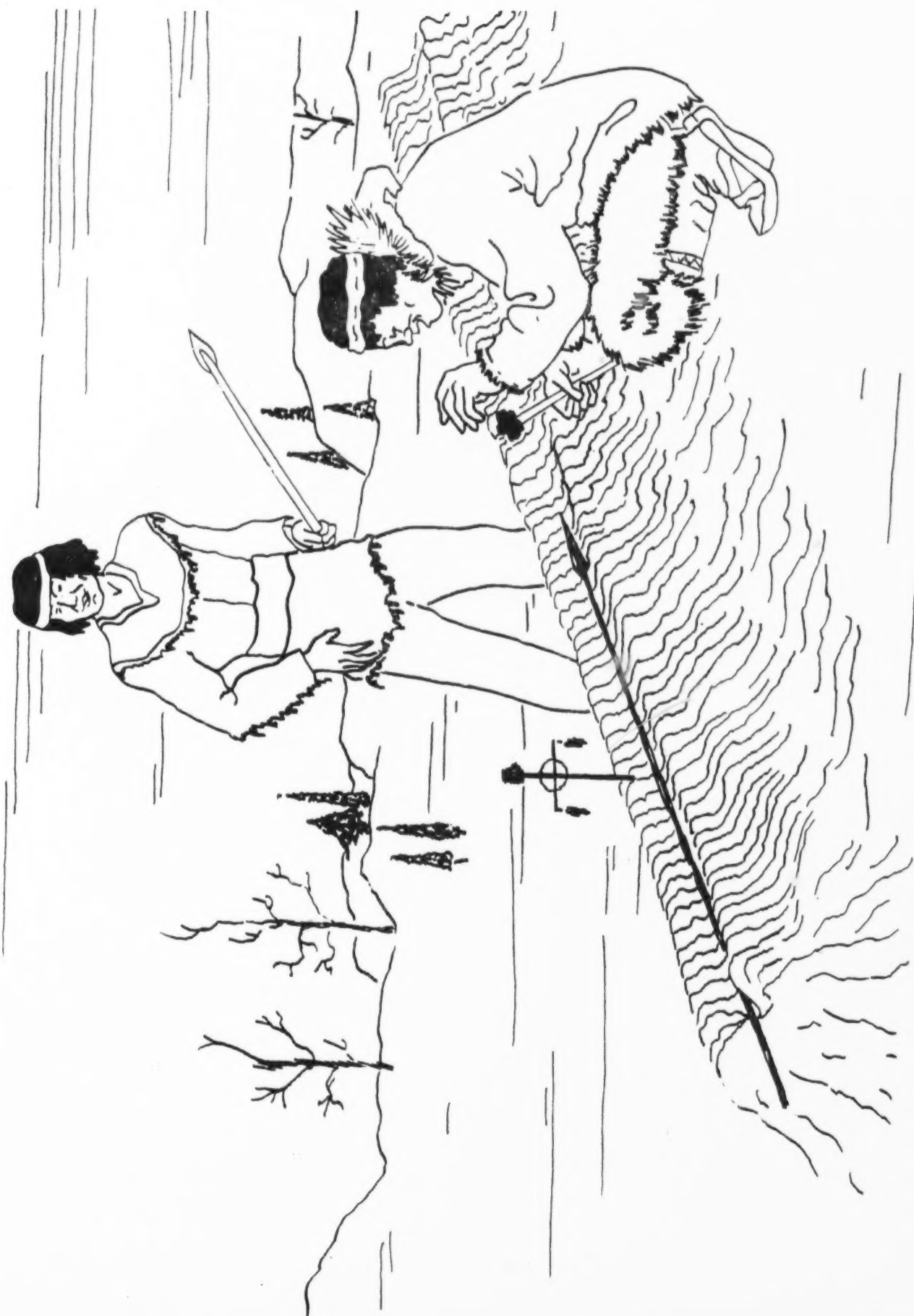
SNOWSNAKE (cont'd.)

keep it in the ditch and great strength to make it travel a great distance. Indians have been known to hurl their snowsnakes at a speed of more than one hundred and twenty miles per hour, and to cover a distance of more than one mile. This interesting game was one of the favorite games of the woodland Indians.

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INDIAN COUNTING GAME

For some Indian children arithmetic was learned by playing a game. Using a special string of objects, basic mathematic skills of counting, addition and subtraction were learned while the child developed his coordination and competitive ability.

In assembling this game a three inch long bone needle was made to string various objects on a 12 inch long strip of rawhide. First a three inch disk was added. Several holes of various sizes were punched into the disk. A large buckeye was then added, and then a hazelnut. Eight polished deer toes were then strung onto the strip.

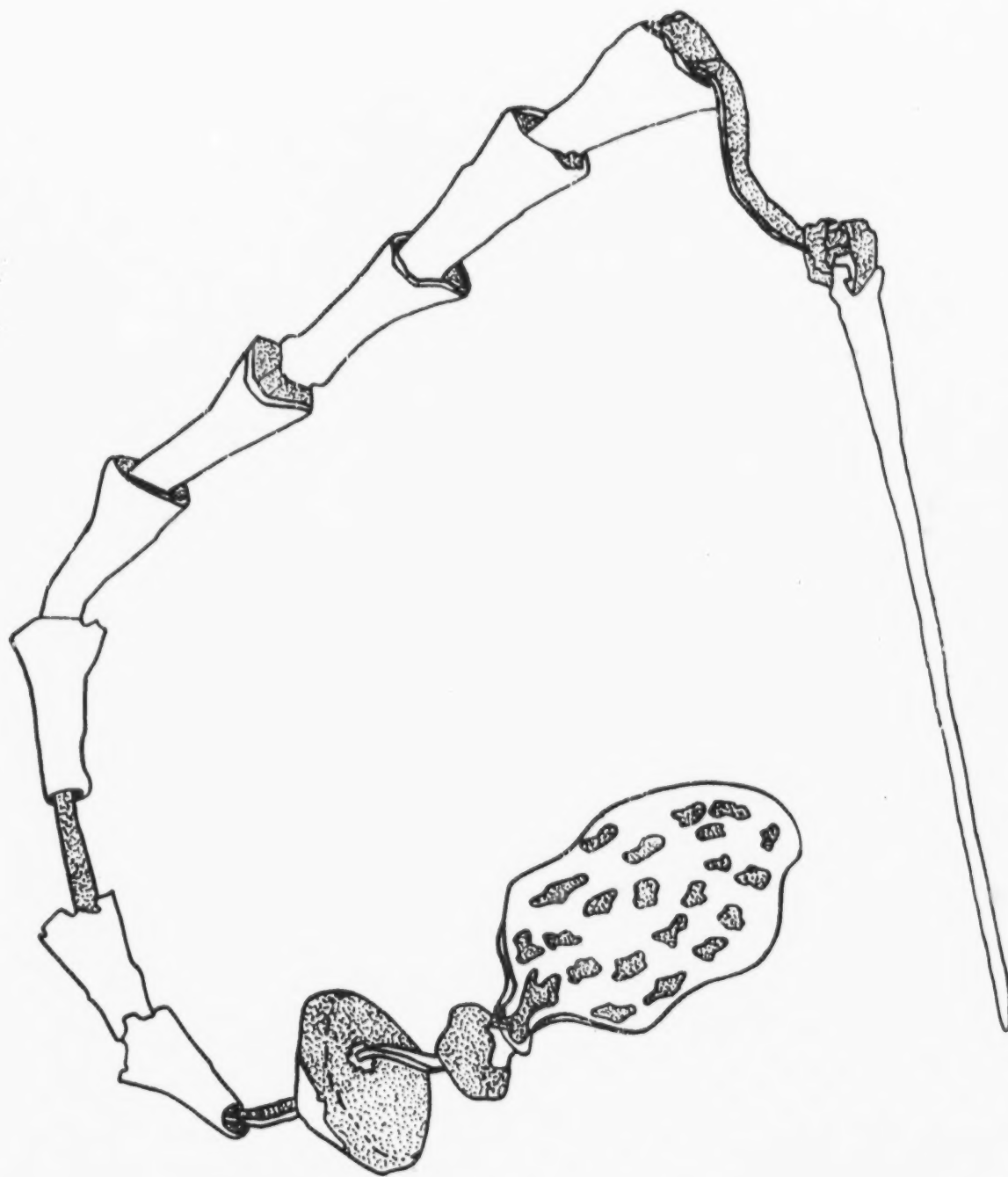
Holding the needle in one hand the player tossed the string of objects into the air and tried to spear the needle through one of the holes in the objects. Each object had a point value depending on the value the players gave the object before the start of the game. This is one way it might have been scored: The total game score was 100. The player who reached this score first won the game. If in adding up points a player went over the 100 mark he had to start over. Objects were scored in this manner:

Buckeye	20 points
Hazelnut	10 points
Buckskin Disk	1 point for each hole speared
Deer Toes	1 point for each toe speared

Various other points were used, depending on how the players decided they wanted to score the objects. Any number of people played the game.

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Teacher - OUMI

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Grades 9 and up

Excellent as a teaching aid about American Indians. Cataloged according to use of homes, clothing, art, music, games and sports, and the culture of the people who lived and produced the many artifacts illustrated.

Tunis, Edward. INDIANS. World, 1959 \$6.95 Grades 6 and up

The author discusses such aspects of Indian life as dwellings, crafts, foods, clothing, weapons, games and social customs. Readable history of Indian groups of the United States.

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